

# Affordable healthcare a key concern of older adults

Job security, state of economy among other worries of respondents in poll

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Over 74 per cent of older adults between the ages of 56 and 75 are concerned with access to affordable healthcare even as Singapore makes plans to transition into an endemic phase of Covid-19.

Of the 7,428 respondents to a survey conducted in August, 71.03 per cent also expressed concern over the uncertainties caused by the disease, while 70.48 per cent were worried about contracting it.

These were among the key findings from Singapore Management University's Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (Rosa) released at a symposium yesterday. The report compiled data from research that Rosa conducted in August and October.

Of the 7,021 respondents polled in October, around 56 per cent were worried about performing regular antigen rapid tests and 53.55 per cent were most troubled by the restrictions on social gatherings.

Singapore has just emerged from a stabilisation phase and has relaxed measures on group sizes for dining out and gatherings. But with a new variant, Omicron, emerging, the country's multi-ministry task force on Covid-19 yesterday said it will hold off on further relaxation though not roll back current measures for now.

Participants in the survey also highlighted their concerns over the economy and job security.

In August, nearly 70 per cent said they were worried about the state of the economy, while 60.37 per cent said job security was what kept them on edge.

In his address as guest of honour at the symposium, Manpower Minister Tan See Leng said businesses have to transform their approach to the employment of older workers and would only benefit from it.

"Employers must invest in building up the human capital of their workforce, including the training and retention of their experienced senior and mature workers, many of whom have built up deep pools of tacit knowledge and know what makes the business tick," he told the symposium.

Dr Tan, who is also Second Minister for Trade and Industry, said organisations like Rosa could play a critical role in helping society rethink its attitudes on ageing, and help more to view ageing as a positive force.

Economist Kim Seonghoon from SMU said the various government schemes currently in place to support the employment of older workers would give companies the opportunity to understand how best to deploy them within their workforce.

"I think of the older worker as a kind of new machine or new technology that has not been used before," Assistant Professor Kim said during a panel discussion.

"So we need to encourage the private sector or employers to use them first. Once they get to use



Patients at Bukit Merah Polyclinic in October. Of the 7,428 respondents to a survey conducted in August, 71.03 per cent expressed concern over the uncertainties caused by Covid-19. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

them, they will learn how to use them better."

Prof Kim, who is deputy director of Rosa, stressed the importance of continued government support

to maintain employment during the pandemic. "To improve employment levels of older workers, we must first recover from the pandemic, then we can shift focus on

returning employment to levels prior to the pandemic."

Participants in the conference also suggested that employers start thinking of systematically refreshing job roles for all employees, not just older workers, which would help foster a spirit of learning and staying relevant. Having to learn new responsibilities would also keep cognitive skills sharp as the employee gets older.

Professor Ursula M. Staudinger from the Dresden University of Technology said training of workers mostly takes place when they first come into the workforce in their 20s and 30s, but by the time they get to their early 40s they get comfortable with a certain position and the motivation to improve themselves stops.

"As soon as adults unlearn learning, it will be extremely hard to get them back into a learning mode," she said.

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